2:Sanders E-5 (no date) 1949 EE1 Bulgaria EE1



## CHAPTER III

# LAND, LABOR, AND MONEY

A PEASANT'S life in spring and summer centered around the narrow strips of earth which surrounded the village. If the scene of labor was distant from the village, the tired workers who had been at their tasks since sunup often spent the night in the field rather than trudge the long way back home. In the middle of the morning, at noon, and again in midafternoon, the toilers stopped long enough for food, sometimes only bread and salt, and a little sleep. The burning noonday sun sifted through the leaves of the solitary tree beneath which the people sprawled. Fragile rays danced upon tired faces, old-fashioned costumes, a hand raised to brush away a fly, and oxen chewing lazily. Like animals the peasants worked, like animals they slept; but when harvest time brought an end to their toil they experienced the joyous satisfaction of work well done.

The average farm was about eighteen acres in size and was composed of sixteen separate and widely scattered strips. (See Table 10, Appendix I.) This land sold for a comparatively high figure because of its nearness to Sofia, but not because of any superior quality. In fact, most of the soil was sandy and gravelly, with a mixture of heavy clay.

In addition to a house in the village and his land, the peasant also owned a few animals and agricultural implements. The work animals numbered fewer than two for an eighteen-acre holding, and the plow was the only large implement found on every farm. More than any other joint operation, plowing had the flavor of an antique ritual. At dawn a slow procession moved from the village. The distant Balkan range loomed vaguely blue far across the Sofia plain, and the golden dome of Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia shone in the thin, clear light of morning. Behind the village, the slopes of

2: Sanders E-5 (no date) 1949 EE1 Bulgaria EE1



Vitosha and snow-covered Cherni Vruh, its peak, looked raw and wild. Against this background a trio of woman, ox, and man was repeated over and over as the households fell into line. The woman came first, leading the moon-eyed oxen which drew the crude wagon with the wooden plow inside. Behind them walked the man who was to guide the plow. He carried a long staff to poke the oxen when they grew sluggish at their task. With the stately pace set by the animals, the peasants walked as gravely through the hush of early morning as though they were moving to some pagan altar rising in the dewy fields. Time slipped back for me countless centuries when I saw the first spring plowing, for small boys had hung the oxen with garlands as though these animals had been meant for sacrifice.

As the days passed, this picture had its variations. Black buffalo, with a cruel crocodile look on their faces, sometimes replaced the oxen; occasionally the woman was busy about something else and the man plowed alone. If the beasts got off the track, a flood of abusive language burst forth from the exasperated peasant. The sound of the language and the pitch of the voice were even more effective than the meaning. Not only in Dragalevtsy but all over Bulgaria, slowly and laboriously the heavy earth was broken with endless patience, for almost three-fourths of the plows had wooden shares, and oxen outnumbered horses four to one.

After the seed was in the ground the peasants left the responsibility mainly to God, but partly to the field policeman and his routine patrols. To ensure God's benevolence the village had a special day for a religious procession through the fields: the first Thursday after St. George's Day (May 6). Once the constant beating of the church bell coming from a strange direction attracted my attention to a spot about one mile east of the village. There was Father Sava, the priest, in his official regalia, accompanied by several boys carrying the church cross, the bell, a flag, and large icons. From forty to fifty villagers followed in a winding line. The procession stopped to pray for rain in several places where there had been insufficient rainfall. Later I learned that on one occasion the party had climbed almost to the top of Vitosha in order to fulfill to the letter their mission of encircling all of the fields owned by the Dragalevtsy people.

462 more than merely chop weeds and loosen the soil; they also afforded
241 an opportunity for visiting and conversation. A day or two ahead
476 of time the woman needing help broached the matter to those whose
576 assistance she wanted in her cornfield. She was careful to include only those women who would work in a congenial manner, shunning those known to be gossipy or quarrelsome. At four in the morning on the day of the hoeing the hostess had to go to the home of each guest.

"Anka, Anka," she called above the barking of the menacing dogs. Anka came to the door to greet her walking alarm clock with a cheery *"Dobro utro"* ("Good morning"). Since Anka owed the visitor two days of work for having helped with her cornfield, she readily accepted, hurried about her household tasks, and was ready to leave for the fields by six o'clock. Young women received many invitations because they could better withstand the summer heat. Occasionally, young men, upon hearing that their sweethearts were to be invited, asked the hostess the night before to call them along with the others in the morning. In the field all day long they had a wonderful opportunity to hoe next to the girls of their choice and "to tell secret things and to speak what they shouldn't."

● 461 Each woman brought her heavy, semicircular hoe and her own
436 bread, but the hostess provided the vegetables and other food. Some-
576 times the people were paid in cash for their work, but more often the work was repaid in kind. The oldest maiden was "at the post." She apportioned the number of rows and kept the workers from getting in each other's way. She set the pace as the workers moved in a line, side by side, across the field. Her word was supreme, and even the hostess kept quiet, although she might think the girl was giving poor directions. The hostess watched the time and told the group when to stop working for the three meals she served. The girl "at the post" gave the signal to resume work, but she did not urge others to work until she saw that the group sentiment favored it. If one woman was not ready to start, the others began anyway. But the niceties of etiquette were always observed: the hostess, who was profiting from the work, invited the group to stop to eat; a guest, who was directing the group, rather than the hostess, suggested that they take up work once more.

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was directing the group, rather than the hostess, suggested that they take up work once more.

I spent many hours in the fields chatting with these women. There was a hypnotic rhythm of sound and color in their work as the line of black-clad bodies, and white headcloths, swayed forward together through the thin green blades. In the high altitude everything was sharply defined: the red-roofed village two miles away, the puffs of white cloud infinitely high in the blue, the strong harsh peasant voices close by. While the women worked they sang old folk songs about beautiful heroines and the brave Krali Marko, a legendary Balkan hero who carried out prodigious feats against the Turks, or of peasant girls knitting gay stockings for village boys. The songs were usually romantic and often were cheerful in theme; but now and then one was moved by a haunting sadness deeper even than that of the Negro work songs. Hour after hour I used to hear the unhappy music rise in its bizarre cadence; day after day for three weeks the corn was hoed in one field after another. Week after week the sun beat down on Vitosha and the Sofia plain, while summer burned itself away. The corn grew waist high, then shoulder high, and finally yielded the golden ears to the strong brown fists of some boy or girl at the autumn cornhusking *sedenki.*

Early July was the haying season. Each sunrise would find most of the villagers out in the fields. Some of the men with their sharp scythes cut the hay in even swaths, letting it lie as it fell, to dry in the parching sun. Others would load the cured hay onto the wagons fitted out with ladderlike sides. As the wagons rolled through the village streets they were greeted by the little children who had had to stay at home with their aged grandparents or great-grandparents. The haystacks, whether left in the field or dressed near the house, were weighted down by lines to which heavy stones had been attached.

One could not be with the peasants long at haying time, or indeed at any other time, without sensing their feeling of close dependence upon the weather. In fact, I soon found myself sharing this feeling, although I remained somewhat dubious of the infallibility of the signs by which they "read the weather." They believed, for example,

2; Sanders E-5 (no date) 1949 EE1 Bulgaria EE1



*stopanin*, or male head of the house, killed the cock and held its twitching body over a bag of grain seed so that several drops of blood would fall upon it. He then drove slowly to the field to prepare the ground for the sowing, meanwhile eagerly awaiting the arrival at midmorning of the *domakinya*, his wife, dressed in her most beautiful costume and bearing a pan containing the boiled cock, meal, and bread. The family group made a tour once around the field, whereupon the man solemnly broke the bread and, before sitting with the others in the middle of the field to feast, gave pieces of the bread to the oxen. The peasants called this the "sweetest meal of the year" and delighted in having friends from a neighboring field join them in the repast. Summer's hard work was at an end; the harvests were plentiful; the peasants were deeply grateful.

Life in these scattered fields of Dragalevtsy was hard and laborious, but to the peasant, life without the fields would not be worth living, for these narrow strips of land were his children growing under his painstaking care. The land was his companion and friend, as he shared with it the thoughts and dreams of a starlit summer night, with a cloak for a pillow and dew for a blanket. Land meant more to the peasant than money in the bank; it meant more than food on the table; it meant life itself.

Some years ago I heard a Sofia University professor say in a lecture that the Bulgarian peasant was more devoted to his work than to his religion. "There are more songs dedicated to labor than to saints," he added. Because I wondered about the truth of this statement in respect to Dragalevtsy, I polled village opinion. Here are some of the questions I asked, with representative or characteristic responses:

*Nowadays, which do people enjoy most: working in the field or sitting in the tavern?*

"People work to get bread. They can't earn money enough to save. Some prefer to work in the fields because we quarrel when we are in the *hrachma*."

2:Sanders E-5 (no date) 1949 EE1 Bulgaria EE1



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"Most of the people prefer to be in the tavern, though there are some who go there to do *pazarluk* [arrange a business deal], drink a little, then leave to do their work again."

"I prefer to work in the fields than to sit in the tavern."

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*Why do young people want to become artisans and do not want to become farmers?*

"They want easier work. Field work is heavy. If they work inside, they will live longer, the wind won't beat in their faces, they won't remain in the cold."

"It's better to work inside than out in the weather."

"If one is an artisan, one won't become hungry. There will always be work to do. But in the fields things are not so sure. Work is easier as an artisan than as a farmer. The money is only of minor importance."

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*Do people of Dragalevtsy, like the heroes of old folk songs, love hard work more than easy work?*

"They prefer easy work. Fifty years ago people liked the harder work, for there were few occupations. Now parents don't control their children. A son sees his father at one tavern and he goes to the other. If his father comes to the second tavern, then he goes back to the first. Formerly people had big fields and had to do much work. They prided themselves on the amount of work they could get done. They were healthier, because they didn't smoke and drink so much. The one who could work the most was the most honored. Now the fields are small. There is little work to do in them, and so people get out of the habit of working hard."

"They like easier work now. Everyone looks for something that is light. It was not so fifty years ago, but the change came about especially since the war."

"They love easy work. Formerly there were more animals, more fields, less people, and therefore more work."

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*With what adjective would a Dragalevtsy peasant prefer to be described: industrious, rich, influential, wise?*

105 The Bulgarian case seems particularly apropos for such a study. Unlike Czarist Russia or the countries of Asia, pre-Communist Bulgaria had developed a relatively free and advanced society. Within the framework of a most liberal and democratic constitution, of a social structure without any noticeable class differences and of a predominantly agricultural economy based on independent small landholdings, Bulgaria had produced a social legislation among the [162] most progressive of our time. Native intelligentsia and labor alike represented only about 20 per cent of the population and were nothing more than recent offspring of the nation's backbone—the peasantry—so that no logical conflict of interests had a chance to develop in Bulgaria. Labor, in particular, 466 had attained, as early as the twenties, the ● 461 status of free labor with all necessary requisites, such as freedom of professional organization, free collective bargaining and impartial settlement of labor disputes, the right to strike, freedom of choosing and changing job, and a firm legal protection, including social security. In fact, by 1924, Bulgaria had incorporated into her domestic legislation all recommendations of the International Labor Office of the League of Nations.*

668 In such a harmonious environment, Communism could not and did not have any chance of success. Still, Communist attempts to artificially create a "social problem" and exploit it for their own purposes go way back to the turn of the century, when, in 1903, a small group of Lenin's followers split from the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party and formed a radical-revolutionary nucleus, known later

113 *For detailed background information and source material, see author's study *Trade Unions and Labor Legislation in Bulgaria (1879-1953)* (New York: Mid-European Studies Center, 1953).

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crime against the state and put within the proscription of Communist criminal law. Any transgression on the part of a worker is, therefore, a direct offense against the state authority. It is easily understandable why Communist criminal law has engulfed the great part of matters which usually pertain to labor legislation, and why even the latter is punitive rather than protective in character.

The basic legal documents related to labor law and relations in Communist Bulgaria are the constitution,[7] the Code of Labor[8] and the Statute of the Trade Unions.[9] They, of course, are supplemented by various acts which, according to the Communist doctrine of "normative acts,"[10] can and do supersede previous legislation, no matter what governmental body originated them.

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According to the constitution, labor, besides being "a right," is "a duty and a point of honor for every able-bodied citizen. It is the duty of every citizen to engage in socially useful labor and to work according to his powers and ability."[11] Of course, it is the government which enforces the observance of this constitutional norm and establishes the "social utility" of the work done. In practice, "the duty to work" is exemplified in the complete regimentation of Bulgaria's labor force.

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Two governmental agencies, the Office of Labor Cadres and the Main Board of Labor Reserves, are especially entrusted with the registration, distribution, recruitment and complete control of all available manpower from 14 years of age upward. Their basic tasks are, in Communist language, "to register the available labor force by finding and keeping at hand, through registration, all employed and unemployed workers; to find them appropriate jobs and, with respect to the fulfillment of the Five-Year Economic Plan, to meet the needs of the industrial, constructional, and other enterprises by guaranteeing to them the necessary manpower . . . . Workers who leave their jobs arbitrarily and without excusable

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[7] *Izvestiya na Presidiuma na Narodnoto Sobranje*, Year II, No. 91, November 13, 1951, in Bulgarian.

[8] *Ustav na Profesionalnite Buyuzi v Narodnata Republica Bulgaria* (Statute of the Trade Unions in the People's Republic Bulgaria), approved by the Third Congress of the Bulgarian trade unions, December, 1951 (Sofia: *Profizdat*, 1952), in Bulgarian.

[9] In Communist jurisprudence, any act of a central governmental authority prevails upon preceding legislation, without distinction of formal superiority. The "doctrine of normative acts" is summarized in United States Department of Labor bulletin cited at footnote 1, pp. 5 and 6.

[10] Art. 73.

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should report to the committee without discontinuing their work." The decree declares two hours overtime is "lawful," so that the working day in Bulgaria usually consists of ten hours, six days a week, and neither the recesses nor even the time when the workers are paid are included in the working time.[80] Furthermore, "it is an archaic damaging tradition for some workers to be absent from work during religious holidays."[81] And Article 79 of the Labor Code regulates the labor remuneration in cases of work on Sundays and the seven official holidays in a year, thus rendering any day of the year a potential, and usually an actual, working day. A Communist source itself admitted that Bulgarian enterprises "regularly use overtime work and deprive the workers of their week ends."[82]

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Usually, overtime work does not help to fulfill or overfulfill the norm either. But even if it does, the quest for more production and productivity of labor never stops. The principal means for extracting a maximum effort from the workers are the so-called socialist competitions or emulations. They represent officially staged contests between individual workers or among plants to "overfulfill" the established norms. The cruelty of this system lies in the fact that as "competitions" are labelled "voluntary," no worker can claim overtime pay. Furthermore, competitions lead inexorably to the establishment of higher quotas and automatically lower the piece rates of even the general wage level.

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"Socialist competition has become a law of the socialist society and has turned into one of the most important methods for Communist education of the working people, an instrument for making them participate in the governmental build-up and the process of production," the Soviet Encyclopedia frankly states.[83] That Communist Bulgaria follows the identical path is plainly evident from the words of the president of the Bulgarian trade unions, Prakhov, who, in 1951, proclaimed "socialist competitions" as "a permanent system for building socialism" and gave the number of participants at "about 70 per cent" of all Bulgarian workers.[84]

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Within the framework of this almost suicidal drive for ever-increasing daily per-

[80] Art. 49, par. 3, and Art. 71 of the Code of Labor.
[81] *Trud*, December 27, 1951.
[82] *Trud*, October 10, 1951.
[83] *Bolshaya Sovetskaya Encyclopediya*, 2d Ed., Vol. 14; *Disciplina Trudoj*, in Russian.

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> The Soviet trade unions generally supervise the carrying out of the plans for the construction of dwellings and communal buildings and take part in the distribution of new buildings to the workers, and in this connection their proposals have a decisive importance.—Leonid Nikolaevich Solovyov, Secretary, All-Union Central Council of Trades Unions, USSR.

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half an hour more than twice a month."[46] It should be understood that the minimum consequence of a dismissal is labor mobilization.

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The following remarks of an authority on Soviet labor have full validity for Communist Bulgaria as well: "The fear of being late became a nightmare to workers, many of whom had no watches or clocks, and sent them speeding to work in frantic haste. The same fear made them gulp their lunch as quickly as possible."[47] It sounds unbelievable that such a casual infraction as tardiness can ultimately lead to imprisonment or forced labor.

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As to inefficiency, the recently enacted Decree for Payment of Dead Time and Rejects in Industry, Construction and Transport[48] supplemented the disciplinary punishments of the Labor Code by introducing financial liability for stoppage and defective output. The most unusual feature represents the fact that a worker is deprived of up to 30 per cent of his wage even if he is not responsible for the stoppage or defective output.[49]

This Communist anomaly is even more clear in the provisions regulating the financial responsibility for damages caused to the enterprise. Guided by the principle that "socialist property" is more precious than

[46] Grounds for dismissal in Art. 33 of the Labor Code.
[47] Work by Schwarz, cited at footnote 1, p. 105.
[48] *Izvestiya na Presidiuma na Narodnoto Sobranje*, No. 22, April 21, 1953.
[49] Art. 2 and 7 of the Decree for Payment of Dead Time and Rejects.
[50] Cf. Arts. 1 and 51 of the Penal Code of the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic (*Ugolovnyi Kodex RSFSR*, in Russian). Also, Arts. 1 and 31 of the Bulgarian Penal Code of 1951.
[51] Art. 28 of the Labor Code.
[52] Cf. Art. 2 of the Penal Code.
[53] Art. 208, par. 2 of the Labor Code.
[54] This complete disregard for tradition and objective conditions has so much disorganized the national economy and antagonized the

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465 human life and that the "social harm" of an offense is all that matters," Communist legislation makes a worker "responsible for an amount higher than the actually caused damages," " besides, of course, his liability under criminal law.

It is evident that all these financial liability provisions not only reduce the already very low wages of the Bulgarian workers but also violate internationally accepted legal principles—such as the exclusion of liability exceeding actual damage or of liability without guilt or negligence. This is not surprising if one bears in mind that the Bulgarian Penal Code also recognizes the application of the principle of analogy in criminal law," and the Labor Code proclaims the principle that "acts of indictment have the force of proof until the contrary is proven" "—that is, one is presumed guilty unless he proves his innocence.

172 46 466 185 Analysis of labor and relations in Communist Bulgaria leads to the conclusion that the Bulgarian labor pattern is a carbon copy of the Soviet original. Neither democratic traditions nor social harmony have been taken into consideration. In their blind imitation, the Bulgarian Communists are trying to change the very basis of Bulgarian economy—from agriculture to heavy industry—as if they were mightier than the very nature which deprived the country of the elements required for such a transformation. Their only guiding light is the Soviet example, no matter how detrimental its application on Bulgarian soil might be."

600 The Bulgarian case—most suitable to test Communism in export—has brutally refuted any illusion that Communism can be "different" if applied in more advanced societies. The tragic paradox of the Communist experiment with the Bulgarian workers is that the alleged primary beneficiaries of the new "socialist order" have, instead, received the harshest possible deal. [The End]

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461 ● 461 population that purges of scapegoats and acts of dispair have been a permanent feature in Bulgaria as well. The workers, in particular, have dashed pointed guns during the recent open unrest in Plovdiv, the second largest Bulgarian city, and in many other cities (Pleven, Pernik, Haskovo, Gorna Dubumaja). In order to prevent the worst, the government, under Moscow's guidance, has announced a so-called new course, consisting of promises to raise the living standard and to relax the socialist labor discipline. The implementation of these promises is still to come. They clearly imply, however, that the Communist experiment has not succeeded in either converting the Bulgarian workers to Communism or breaking their spirit of resistance. (For details, see work cited at footnote 29, Ch. VIII-X.)

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466 tax, but owing to the poverty of the masses only about 10%, of those liable to serve avail themselves of this opportunity to affranchise themselves, though the percentage of the older classes which liberate themselves from temporary incorporation for 21 days reaches 20% to 25%.

[461] The aim of the law is not merely economic, but also aims at instilling among the conscripts of the labour corps a better comprehension of their duty towards the community, a sense of solidarity, and also a liking for manual work, and open air living, especially among the intelligentsia, who considered any sort of field work beneath their dignity. Originally the law did not provide for exemption by payment, as M. Stambuliiski, who was its chief inspirer, pursued at the same time, another object, that of humbling and persecuting all his bourgeois opponents, but the representatives of the Entente Powers intervened and succeeded in introducing certain modifications which rendered the application of the law much more lenient.

466 653 The State has derived substantial help from the utilisation of the labour corps, and it must be admitted that the condition of both the railways and roads on the repairing of which the labour corps was largely employed would have been infinitely worse off, since the State would not have been in a position to defray the work accomplished on them.

Between the years 1921 and 1931, the annual contingent of youths called upon to join the labour corps varied between 12,000 and 19,000; all those liable to service were not utilised, there not being a sufficiency of work for all, owing to the lack of resources and absence of a plan. It was for the first time in 1932 that as many as 20,750 were incorporated, the number being increased to 26,000 in 1933. The greater part of these labour conscripts were utilised for the construction of railways and